

Nadaam

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These pictures were taken in August at Targan Nuur, in Mongolia. Targan Nuur is a lake in the Darkhad Depression of Northern Mongolia, located some 30 miles from the border with Russia. Around the lake is a smattering of settlements—primarily summer camps—of herders and their families. The events in these pictures are from a Naadam Festival. Often nicknamed the “Mongolian Olympics,” a Naadam traditionally consists of “the three manly sports”—those being archery, wrestling, and horse racing. There is a national Naadam held every July in Ulaanbaatar, but most villages also have their own at some point in the summer. This Naadam at Targan Nuur was very small, a one-day event showcasing only wrestling and a horse race. But it was certainly popular, with people coming to see their relatives and friends as much as trying to win prizes or stock up on candy sold by the vendors.



Teenage boys, now too old to compete in the horse racing, but not yet strong enough to really have a chance at the wrestling, gather to watch and socialize. Motorcycles are

becoming increasingly popular, and largely replacing horses as transportation. Likewise, although most people have Western-style clothing, deels (the traditional robe worn by both men and women) are still popular for their warmth and fashion.



The average age of the children in the race was around 8 or 9. This boy, wearing a fabulous cape and holding a whip made of a goat leg, was looking extremely worried. The older man, presumably his father or grandfather, was trying to console or encourage him before the children trotted off to the starting line.



Although women are still not allowed to wrestle, they now often participate in archery and horse racing. As it turned out, a young girl won the race this year! This is a shot of her crossing the finish line.



A group of children followed the winner—competition was fierce! The children usually rode bare-backed, and egged their horses on by yelling “CHOO” and lightly kicking or whipping them.



After the race, a man inspects a horse. He scolded the boy whom this horse belonged to, as the horse was clearly underfed and had a large

festered sore on his jaw. Horses are beloved possessions in the Darkhad, with the majority of popular songs (even today) featuring odes to horses and even hoof beats in the background. It is rare to see a horse as ill cared for as this one.



The prizes were certainly a highlight of the Naadam—the winning wrestler took home a motorcycle! This boy was second place. He looks less than ecstatic at having done so well (bummed because he was beat by a girl?), and nothing his father or brother (not pictured) said could cheer him up. His father holds a new flat screen TV as the prize, which really is rather exciting. But for an event that comes once a year, I guess second place isn't good enough!